



Letter to Airmen

Honorable Michael W. Wynne
Secretary of the Air Force

Wednesday, March 08, 2006

Letter to Airmen: Air Force Smart Operations 21

Our role as an Air Force is to provide an array of capabilities for the Combatant Commanders to use as directed by the President. These capabilities include the widest variety of joint operations from combat operations to humanitarian aid. Like any other organization, we must seek to constantly give value to our “customers.” It’s not only the right thing to do for the American taxpayer; it’s the smart thing to do.

In my December “Letter to Airmen,” I talked about expanding LEAN concepts beyond just depot operations. That effort has now grown into *Air Force Smart Operations 21 (AFSO 21)*, a dedicated effort to maximize value and minimize waste in our operations. AFSO 21 is a leadership program for commanders and supervisors at all levels, looking at each process from beginning to end. It doesn’t just look at *how* we can do each task better, but asks the tougher and more important question: *Why* are we doing it this way? Is each of the tasks relevant, productive, and value added? In other words is it necessary at all? With AFSO 21, we will march unnecessary work out the door – forever.

AFSO 21 signifies a shift in our thinking. It is centered on processes (groups of tasks) rather than tasks alone, which allows us to gain insights into the value, or lack of value, in each task we perform. For example, why does an EPR take 21 days at some bases to process, and only 8 at another? We must do better across the entire Air Force, and no process is immune from this critical review. AFSO 21 is built on successful principles from the corporate world, and has already yielded results in the Air Force. AFMC has used the tenets of AFSO 21 to put an extra 100 tankers back on the line each day. AFSO 21 is about working smarter to deliver warfighting capabilities.

We must continue to meet our worldwide requirements even with the continued pressure on our budget. But AFSO 21 is not about cost cutting; it enables our service to take our warfighters of today and grow them into the most effective and efficient thinkers for 2010 and beyond. The continuous process improvements of AFSO 21 will be the new culture of our Air Force. We will look at innovative ways to use our materiel and personnel more efficiently. For example, we’re already planning on using the Guard and Reserve differently under the concept of Total Force Integration, capitalizing on their inherent strengths.

As AFSO 21 training comes to your base, ask yourself, “What have I improved today?” Every idea is worth taking to your supervisor. To learn more about the AFSO 21 program, visit the AFSO 21 website at <http://www.afso21.hq.af.mil/>. I have full faith that by implementing AFSO 21 together, we will make our Air Force not only more effective, but will drastically improve our combat capability.




Michael W. Wynne
Secretary of the Air Force